tasting paradise

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tasting paradise

by kitsunei

Summary

Will Graham, an associate professor at Quantico University and self-appointed recluse, accepts an invite to an exclusive dinner party hosted by the enigmatic Baltimore socialite, Dr. Hannibal Lecter—only to discover it's an undercover bacchanalian feast for a coven of wealthy, hedonistic vampires and their human initiates.

Notes

Hello!

Welcome to my first post of 2022. This was originally written as a oneshot but the story… expanded. So for your sanity and mine, I've split it into three chapters. If this first chapter (or the rather colourful tags) piques your interest, subscribe to this fic so you'll get the following weekly updates as they come! Thank you to my dear possums who supported me as I wrestled with this story. Your faith in my creativity means the world to me. Hope you enjoy!

- Kit :)

See the end of the work for more notes

You

“I gave shape to my fears and made excuses…” - Richard Siken

“You’re into him.”

“Who?”

“I profile people for a living, Alana, I know attraction when I see it,” says Will. His silk bow-tie feels a bit too snug around his neck but she had insisted upon tying it for him. Fast forward to now and he’s trying to ignore how this expensive tuxedo has him looking like an abandoned bridegroom. “You’re into Dr. Lecter. Romantically.” He elaborates, smoothing out his shirt. Most days, Will prefers to keep it simple in terms of a polished silhouette. A nice shirt here, a neat blazer there. In light of Dr. Lecter’s mysterious black-tie dinner party, however, he’s stepping up to the plate with his choice of cufflinks. They’re a family heirloom, a pair of oval amethysts set in antique silver. His father once claimed they were a good luck charm. Whatever. Placebo or not, Will could do with some luck. Partying has never been his thing. Ever.

“You profile killers, Will. It’s different.” Alana replies, rolling her eyes.

“And yet I didn’t hear you deny it.” She huffs. Making no effort to conceal his justified smugness, Will continues to prod at his crushing colleague. He needs the distraction. The startling lack of information surrounding the nature of the party is a playground for Will’s paranoia. Stretched taut across two conflicting states of being, he sits, like a rubber band ready to snap. Alana, on the other hand, is giddy with smitten anticipation. Fuck this. Why had Will gone ahead and said yes to Dr. Lecter’s invitation in person? Left himself with no room to back out whatsoever? Blame the heat of the moment.

All dressed-up, Alana mirrors a classic beauty, her Old Hollywood grin slapped upon a slender, poised frame. Once upon a time, Will would’ve sought more than a tentative friendship with her. He wouldn’t now. Throughout their years teaching on campus together, she’s acted as though Will’s supposed fragile countenance might shatter like a piece of fine china at any second due to his hyperactive empathy. It devolved from being considerate to patronising in a matter of months. Never left much room for a flourishing romance let alone an easy-going friendship. Something tells Will that the likes of Dr. Lecter with his self-sufficient habits wouldn’t appreciate being smothered, either.

“Now, why are you suddenly so invested in my so-called interest in Hannibal? You never did tell me how your brunch with him went, may I add.” Turning to face Will, Alana crosses her arms, her long diamond earrings swinging like miniature chandeliers. Will pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Hey, all I’m saying is that I can recognise a failed attempt in the making when I see one coming.” Her eyes go wide, a hand shielding her mouth. Okay, maybe that was a little harsh.

Truth hurts. And Will hadn't forgotten to tell Alana about brunch with her former mentor, he just decided not to. Yes, he and Dr. Lecter clicked. No, Will won't say so. Whether it was embodied in the pinpoint intensity of the doctor's gaze or the deliberate way in which he spoke, his presence was magnetic, raw. It had goosebumps rising across Will's skin.

Hannibal Lecter is dangerous.

Will senses it deep within his gut. The hidden strain of darkness that Dr. Lecter luxuriates in would eat Will alive. He can't risk falling victim to it. And yet—any minute now, his and Alana's complimentary ride to the party's undisclosed location should arrive at Alana's front door. Fuck, Will should've declined the invitation. Spared his heart the pressure. Since Dr. Lecter reeks of sharp formality, Will won't take his chances. Ditching the party last minute would draw negative attention to himself, which is a far worse fate in Will's head. Instead, he'll stick with his initial plan of bailing out straight after dinner on the well-used excuse that he has work tomorrow. Try to make it out of there alive.

"Right, I forgot you're our resident pessimist." Releasing a long sigh, Alana fetches her suede purse from the kitchen counter and Will takes the opportunity to grab the bottle of fancy pinot noir he bought earlier from the fridge. She shuffles next to him as they spy a sleek, black limousine—this is ridiculous—pull up in her driveway through the window. Sighs again as they pad towards it. "Spare me the grief of joining you in your sad, puritanical regime and let me have this. It won't kill you to have a little hope, Will." This is what Will gets for hanging around psychiatrists and crime scene analysts on the daily. One becomes yet another case for them to dissect and theorize about.

"My sad, puritanical regime? Gee, thanks." Will places a hand to his chest in mock hurt.

"Hannibal Lecter is a wonderful friend and brilliant mind. There's a reason why he invited you to one of his dinner parties so soon after meeting you. Nothing he does is without intention—especially when it comes to choosing his guest list." If Will baulks at the unsettling notion of Dr. Lecter singling him out from the rest of Will's prestigious peers, that's between him and the front door of Alana's townhouse. What did he do to capture Dr. Lecter's intrigue in this way? There's no need for Will to think of his cryptic language or the understated power that radiated from his demeanour. "Also, he could help you…you know," She gestures at Will's stiff posture and he frowns at the implication, "Loosen up a bit. He's good! Trust me, you'll like Hannibal. You two are similar in a few ways."

"We have met. What the hell are you—" Will cuts himself off, noticing the chauffeur lurch over to open the limousine door for him and Alana. He hesitates approaching at first, until Alana struts ahead and waves him over. What does loosening up entail in her head? They're going to a godforsaken dinner party, not some sleazy nightclub. "Aren't *you* the one who's wanting to get into Dr. Lecter's pants?"

"Did I ever say—"

"You're not that subtle."

"I swear to—" Alana trails off, shaking her head in defeat, "—Look, Will. You've somehow caught Hannibal's eye. And I do want to know how you've managed such a feat without

exerting any effort on your part." Unlike her. One after the other, she and Will greet the driver before settling themselves in the limousine's plush back seat; an elegant scarecrow of a kid. They're off before Will can change his mind. No turning back now. Her brows furrowing, Alana examines him. What she's looking for in his face, Will can't determine. "He's—you'll see. I'm yet to find out what his interest in you entails, but mark my words when I say this. Hannibal Lecter doesn't dole out his attention to just anyone." Will believes her.

The further they drive from Alana's house, the tighter he grips the neck of the wine bottle to stop his hands from shaking. Nothing about this situation does much to ease the plague of dread eating away at Will's conscience. Can anyone blame him for feeling the slightest bit apprehensive about not knowing where they're going, for a start? To Will, something feels off about this whole extravagant charade. Why all the secrecy? Alana doesn't seem to suspect a thing, however, and she's not stupid. So, he's either overthinking or it's a detail she hasn't yet caught. It isn't her first time attending one of Hannibal Lecter's parties like it is for Will, in saying that. None of this fare is new to her. *'Oh, good for you,'* he supposes. Brushing it aside, Will rests his temple against one of the car's tinted windows and pushes his glasses back up his nose. Closes his eyes. At least, he's not alone. He wouldn't have made it this far if he were. The drive to the party is taking longer than the expected ten-minute dash to some nearby Baltimore mansion would require but how can Will know for certain? Like pigs headed to Heaven's slaughterhouse. Placing a manicured hand on Will's shoulder, Alana speaks up again, aware of the extra set of ears.

"Don't panic, Will. If it gets to be too much, find me. Just say the word and I'll get you out of there." Her words take on that concerned, maternal flair he's all too familiar with. With a lazy huff, Will waves her off.

"Alright, alright. And what if it's you rather than me that needs to let loose, so to speak?"

"The difference is that I know how to when you, Graham, do not." Alana laughs and Will only scoffs in answer, zoning out to the ambient noise of spinning wheels upon smooth asphalt. He floats back to the present as the chauffeur announces they've arrived at the party in one piece. The oddly-shaped house in front of them is surrounded by a vast grassy clearing that yields a gravel driveway and a wide concrete patio. A few graceful silhouettes wander around the cliff-side property already, some holding drinks, appetisers, gifts for the host. Both he and Alana are dropped off at the open front door, the yellow light of the hallway spilling onto their shoes.

"I've never been here before," Alana catches a proper glimpse of the house, doing a double-take. "Hannibal's previous parties were held at his home."

"So, something about tonight's oncoming festivities must've provoked the need for a change in scenery. Thrilling," says Will, grimacing at the blatant display of wealth laid out before them. Staring dead into the sun would be an easier task than wallowing in cloying opulence. On a hunt for the missing party host, the two of them cut past mingling guests all dressed to the nines in heavy jewellery and haute couture. A modern equivalent of Mount Olympus, Will's mind supplies. The gods have come out to play, sumptuous and shallow as the low tide. This is the crowd of pompous goons that Hannibal Lecter chooses to surround himself with on the regular? Will would rather throw himself off the nearby cliff.

And then, the kicker. Deviating from the traditional black-tie dress code, the face of almost every attendee is shrouded by an ornate veil. From peacock feathers and jewels to giant pearls to elaborate goldwork, somebody here is wearing it. *'Christ. Impromptu cult meeting?'* Not funny, Will. So much for feeling overdressed. Looking over to Alana for answers, Will hopes she knows something he doesn't. She looks no less baffled. Shit.

"Did we miss the memo?" He whispers, leaning in her direction.

"Hannibal never said anything to me about veils being part of the dress code, no. Um. A new fashion trend?" Alana whispers back, tugging Will along before they become the targets of several weird looks. Where is he? Live baroque music filters through the spacious rooms, punctuated by clinking glasses and murmuring voices in various states of merriment. Alana pauses their search in order to say a cheerful hello to several people Will doesn't recognise. Not too thrilled at the idea of enduring that many awkward introductions at once, he leaves Alana be. No complaints on her end. The walls and corners of the large house are decorated with an eclectic range of colourful artwork and collector's items. At one point, Will even spots a legitimate dinosaur skeleton on display. Christ, what kind of rich eccentric *is* Dr. Hannibal Lecter?

Finding a free space next to the grand piano, Will tucks the bottle of pinot noir into the crook of his arm and prays it suffices. He knows it would've been rude to show up without a gift, but Will can't claim that his wine knowledge spans very far. Top-shelf is more his speed. Crawford's wife confirmed that the brand was up to Lecter's particular standards before Will left his office for the day, so it should be fine. Should be.

From behind the piano, the esteemed host in question emerges. *'Oh, fuck me.'* The air in Will's lungs is knocked out of his throat at the first sight of Dr. Lecter.

"Good evening, Will. You're right on time."

always

Chapter Notes

> Welcome to chapter II, dearest readers! Things are about to get rather gnarly in the club tonight...

“I varied my velocities, watched myselves sleep...” - Richard Siken

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Clad in a double-breasted midnight blue tuxedo, Dr. Lecter looks statuesque. Entirely in his element. He, like many of his guests, also dons a matching veil. The cut diamonds sewed into the flowing silk tulle refract the soft overhead light across his calm, patrician features as if they’re carved from polished marble.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter,” Will replies, straightening his shoulders. Before he can overthink it, he offers Dr. Lecter the wine. Their fingers brush when the doctor grasps the neck of the bottle and hums in approval, hot sparks racing up Will’s arms. Nervous relief drenches his brain and he coughs. “Thanks for the invitation. And—for the ride.” With a swift flick of his wrist, Dr. Lecter sweeps the veil back from his face as if he were a bride standing alone at the altar. Full lips painted crimson, his mouth twists into what resembles a blood-stained smirk.

“It is my pleasure, Will. And please, call me Hannibal.” Oh, god. Will can’t, won’t, let the man sink his teeth into his heart. “God forbid, we lose ourselves to the routine monotony of professional pretences tonight.” Alana spots them amongst the lively crowd a second later, reaching out to shake Hannibal’s hand in eager greeting. Will realises he forgot to do so a second too late, but the doctor moves to shake Will’s hand first without missing a beat. Hannibal’s grip is firm, skin running colder than what Will would expect.

“On the contrary, Doctor. May we find ourselves amidst the oncoming madness.” Will fixes his cufflinks, glancing up at Hannibal as he speaks. A pleased glint shimmers in the doctor’s eye. Before Will can release his hand—both of Hannibal’s large hands seize it, icy fingers sliding up Will’s left wrist. Will freezes, body suspended in shock. He can’t gauge how to react. The pads of Hannibal’s fingertips are rough with calluses and Will’s heart skitters at the feeling of them dragging up the underside of his sweaty palm.

“Yes, my suspicions were correct. These are amethyst cufflinks,” Hannibal turns Will’s wrist to get a better view, “Set in vintage silver, too. Exquisite.” His tone is light, borderline teasing. “How astute of you to involve Grecian sensibilities in your choice of dinner party accessories. Fair play, Will.” Will yanks his hand back and shoves it in his blazer pocket, and Hannibal has the gall to chuckle.

“In my experience, it never does pay to overindulge.” He taps his foot. At this point, Alana may as well be invisible, attempting to conceal her annoyance by making small talk with other guests in the background. One of them, a stone-faced brunette decked out in a litter of dark pink pearls, approaches Alana at the invitation of Hannibal himself. Ever so polite, he acts. To Will, that’s all it is. Hannibal moves like he’s an actor well-acquainted with the script that no one else remembered to read.

“Basal instinct drives us all to seek satisfaction in its diverse forms. The means to desire that which is not yet ours is both Humanity’s claim to greatness and its Achilles’ heel. We live to hunger. Fostering control, for that matter, is a form of gluttony all the same. A small taste of it is never enough—as you may already know.” Failing to hold Hannibal’s infuriatingly neutral gaze, Will chokes on his retort. The hard floor beneath them is smooth, clean. Easier to face. Around his neck, Will’s bowtie still feels far too tight. His body crawls beneath his bespoke suit like he’s a snake that can’t shed its old skin.

“The hunt for satisfaction you speak of is that of a siren call. An illusion of comfort wrapped up in the irresistible urge to die chasing after it. Suit yourself, but I’d rather not take the risk.” Will crosses his arms and tries to sweep the conflicting thoughts from his mind. *‘You said we live to hunger. What if I don’t wish to be hungry?’* Hannibal regards Will with regaled curiosity fit for a housecat, cocking his chin. Peering over at Alana, Pearl Lady is beside her spouting some languid anecdote about the unexpected death of her favourite horse. What a stellar pick for a conversation opener. Of course, Alana’s eating it up.

“Protesting the inevitable won’t save you from falling victim to it. Freedom lies in the wanting.” Hannibal breaks the silence, having not once glanced away from Will, “Do you consider yourself an example, Will?”

“I…” Will licks his lips, “…consider it a matter of the end justifying the means.”

“An undertaking fit for a self-appointed martyr,” Hannibal replies. It shakes a sharp laugh from Will, taken off-guard.

“You think I’m masochistic.”

“We all know that no pleasure is profitable without pain, Professor Graham,” He’s fucking taunting Will, he has to be. “It grounds us in our belief that we are making the right choices. Tell me, Will. Do you think you are?”

“Do you think that you are?” Will bites and Hannibal answers with an assured nod. Bastard. The doctor moves to *finally* greet Alana with a kiss on the top of her palm. Will gets a chance to clean his glasses. Smiling as if Hannibal hadn’t snubbed her in the first place, Alana picks at the embroidered sleeve of her dress. It’s Will’s turn to roll his eyes, wandering away from the duo to further explore the party’s setting. Anything to stop him from walking into the monster’s jaws. Anything to prove that doing so has never crossed his mind during that conversation. He fusses with his cufflinks, inspecting the long line of decorated tables set up in front of the window wall. They’re packed with an excess of beautiful food arranged upon porcelain plating and bottled liquor waiting to be cracked open. To the left sits another smaller table laid out with empty crystal bowls. People are—spitting into them. Disgusting.

Picking at the provided feast, a sizeable group of party-goers hangs around the tables and Will doesn't blame them. He picks up the names of the various dishes by osmosis rather than asking outright, recognising some of the meats and fruits well enough. A stout gentleman, dressed in a cardboard box of a tuxedo and missing a veil, is stuffing his mouth with chunks of fruit cheese as Will rounds the tables. Flinches as if Will had swung at him. Okay then. Another man, robotic in style and demeanour, pours himself a glass of red wine from a dragon-shaped decanter beside his shorter companion. The metallic scent of iron hits Will's nostrils, lingering in the air. Where it's coming from, Will can't quite place. Warm, earthy spices and the smell of fresh ingredients have his stomach grumbling in interest. He pops a few grapes into his mouth and ignores how the robotic man squints in disdain.

"What was that about?" Will hears Alana's voice and turns around to see her. She's also holding a glass of red wine, swaying along to the swelling string quartet. Pearl Lady is nowhere in sight, having left Alana's side to visit the restroom. "With Lecter?"

"He accepted the wine. I'm not dead. Yet." Will shrugs. She frowns.

"You're awfully tense, Will. Everything okay?"

"You're the psychiatrist. You tell me." Alana huffs, shaking her head.

"What did I say about enjoying yourself?"

"I will when Dr. Lecter—" Will's mouth snaps shut at none other than Dr. Lecter's return. The veil shrouds his face once again, allowing Will to pick out the slivers of blue sapphire interwoven amongst the dark silk and heavy diamond-encrusted trim as it floats over the silhouette of Dr. Lecter's brow, his nose. Somehow, Hannibal manages to wear such a piece and make it work alongside the strong, tailored lines of his bespoke suit.

"Are you going to finish that sentence, Will?"

"Everyone else is already talking about you, isn't that enough?"

"I believe if you have something to regale me about, you should." Hannibal takes the opportunity to closely inspect the wine bottle still perched in his free hand. "You are also correct. I do appreciate your thoughtful gift." He passes it to a nearby caterer, murmuring something unintelligible in her ear. Will steals a dumpling from her platter when she slides past him. "Pinot noir is a rather stubborn yet versatile grape. Greatly difficult to cultivate, let alone transform into wine. And yet, it can grow to offer such a decadent medley of flavours."

"A testament to the long-suffering vigneron," says Alana, taking a salmon canapé from the table.

"Or his greed exemplified," Will mutters. Behind him, Alana presses her lips together. Gives Will a pointed look as to say, *'What are you doing?'* Good question.

"The wine is likened to sex in a glass," Hannibal continues, the caterer soon returning with two purple goblets in hand. From the angle where Will is standing, he can't see much over Hannibal's shoulder. How much money those glasses cost, Will would rather not guess.

They're both aware that amethyst has no real influence over one's inhibitions, but Hannibal's clear sentiment is what he catches. Swivelling around, Hannibal presents one of them to Will. Unless the other goblet is for Alana, which Will doubts, Hannibal didn't include her in his request. Ouch. "The fruit of one's desires made manifest."

"Some more gratifying than others," Will flashes him a smile. The wine does look enticing. Smells delicious. He gestures his polite refusal yet the doctor doesn't withdraw his offer. Hannibal just stands there in wait, watching Will. They stare at each other, saying nothing more. Alana doesn't try to interrupt. If she does, well, Will doesn't notice.

One second passes. Two. Three. Neither he nor Hannibal moves a muscle. Will is but a deer in the headlights, rooted where he's stood. Should he accept the wine? Yes. No, he can't. Yes, he should. No. The desire to take it deepens the longer Will studies the goblet, its fragrant contents. "The concept of patience requires the promise of a worthwhile harvest. One's hunger for it."

Four seconds. Five. Six. His heart's beating so fast Will's worried it'll burst from his fucking chest.

"As well as the means to reap that which you've sown. To sate yourself." Hannibal licks his upper lip, his expression imperceptible. A familiar shiver rolls down Will's spine. *'Not now, Will, not now.'* Is this a game they're playing? Seven seconds. Eight. He can't breathe.

"All good things come to those who wait, do you think?" Nine. Ten. Fucking—enough of this. Will relents and takes the goblet from Hannibal's fingers with a quick murmur of thanks. The gold-encrusted amethyst makes the cup heavier than he anticipated. Swirling it, he takes a sip of the wine. Groans at the impeccable flavour. God, Will should've followed his first instinct and taken it the second Hannibal held it out to him. Why didn't he? Hannibal's reserved smile turns borderline impish at the jealous reception of several disgruntled guests.

"I believe that you and I are nothing but patient, Will." The intensity of the moment shatters like broken glass and Will could collapse, cursing under his breath. Any longer and he'd have buckled under the pressure. Hannibal, however, seems unfazed, repositioning his veil as it was first arranged and excusing himself at the sound of one of the caterers calling his name. Alana follows suit, patting Will's shoulder before making her way back to Pearl Lady. They've sure hit it off.

The supple fabric graces Hannibal's jagged face with an imposing shadow, the defined curve of his soft lips. Will bets that the doctor is well aware of how that shade of lipstick is doing him favours. It isn't garish, let alone unbefitting. Every aspect of Hannibal's chosen appearance meshes together in an elegantly enigmatic mask. Deliberate, commanding. The makeup, albeit simple, is no more than a part of tonight's performance. Furthering his point, Will knows that Hannibal doesn't wear it on the regular. The varied reactions of surprise from both Alana and the other guests taking in Hannibal's uncovered face have said enough.

The doctor sure loves to make a statement, doesn't he?

"How's the wine?" Striding over to stand next to him, a tall stranger—one of the few who also isn't wearing a veil—attempts to make small talk. If Will squints, the two of them could

pass as distant relatives. Same hair, similar features. Rather than an interest in him, Will assumes he's been approached concerning Hannibal's earlier charade with the amethyst goblets. Most aren't going to give a shit about a college professor over the likes of a famous psychiatrist. Personally, Will couldn't care less. Glancing over his shoulder, he spots Hannibal standing in front of the back door and sipping from the other goblet, chatting with Alana, Pearl Lady, and a group of other party-goers. Subtlety is not her strong suit. Will turns back to the other man. Nods.

"Rich."

"Always is when you let it sit a little longer." The man answers, reclining against the edge of the table. Blasé about the high-class setting, no doubt. "Why'd he pick that particular glass, I wonder. Why pick you?" There it is.

"Call it a forthright gesture of his confidence. Why not pick me?" The heat of Hannibal's gaze melts the back of Will's skull. Rolling his jaw, Will feigns being unaware. In reality, his breath hitches at the unwanted, unnerving thrill of being observed. "Amethyst was believed by the ancient Greeks to prevent the surrender of their will to their passions."

"And they sure were stellar examples of exercising self-restraint," The other man replies, eyeing Will's wrists. "Lack of faith in yours?"

"What's your name?" Will bristles, straightening his glasses. What does this guy want to achieve here, poking at him like this? Hearing it from Hannibal is more than enough.

"Antony. Yours?"

"Considering your apparent pride in your skills of observation, one would think you'd know better than to play the fool." Crossing his arms, Will glowers at him.

"Ah. Charmed." Antony scratches the back of his neck, no less entertained. Lifting the goblet to his mouth, Will swallows the last of the wine and wipes his mouth. "Well then, Will. How do you know Hannibal Lecter?"

"Mutual connections," Will answers, "You as well?"

"Yes. You could say that." Antony glances away, picking his thumbnail. "Quite the mysterious beast, isn't he? There's…an innate quality about Lecter that simply demands admiration. And all the attention does he garner. With the smallest of acts, mind you!"

"And that's all you see in him?" Will raises a brow.

"It is all he wants us to see, I think." They both peek over at the doctor stalking across the room. His footsteps are silent, sure. He, Alana, and Pearl Lady join him and Antony standing in front of the tables. "There's a blood moon supposed to come out tonight. Did you know that?"

"No, I did not."

“Hello, ladies.” Pearl Lady—what is her name?—is the first to insert herself into their rather stimulating conversation. Antony bows at her in greeting, clearly happy to be in the presence of the man of the hour. “You’re Will Graham, aren’t you? I’m Margot. Your lovely plus one over here filled me in.” Alana sends him a thumbs-up as if he isn’t a grown man entirely capable of socialising whenever he has to endure it.

“Separate invitations, same workplace.” Will shrugs.

“Were you his patient too?” Margot asks, spitting a mouthful of braised pork into one of the provided crystal bowls. Hannibal fixes the angles of the tiny quiches on their platter while Antony admires Will’s empty goblet.

“Seems a bit unprofessional to bring your work life into your social life, don’t you think?”

“Oh, Hannibal Lecter is nothing but professional. It’s not his fault that the two converge in more ways than one,” says Margot, and Antony nods in agreement.

“Come again?” Will replies, his mind supplying a plethora of conclusions surrounding the doctor. What could that possibly mean? Maybe he’ll wake up tomorrow missing a kidney and Hannibal Lecter will be a few thousand dollars richer. Not that he *needs* any more money, judging from his lavish lifestyle.

“Of course, I don’t mean to tattle but Dr. Lecter’s line of work is something else. Dealing with all those patients day after day? Bit of a pain in the neck, if you ask me.”

“For them, perhaps. I am hardly lenient in my approach.” Hannibal quips, making everyone laugh. He gestures at her and then to Will, “Hm. Would you rather choose to endure the academic tribulations associated with teaching college students, Margot?”

“A professor, are you? Impressive. What’s your major?” Margot nods.

“Criminal psychology,” Will answers.

“Wow, look at you.” Anthony grins, “Never short of brains to pick, are we?”

“I’m sure you’ll be in for a treat tonight, then. Both you and Alana,” Margot continues, Alana not having said much. It’s uncharacteristic of her to not join a conversation involving herself as a subject matter, but Will’s not going to call her out for it.

“Careful, Ms. Verger, you’ll scare the new guests.” Hannibal tuts. “Let them decide for themselves whether or not they’ll enjoy tonight’s festivities.”

“I have faith in this one,” Margot nudges Will, spitting out another bite of pork. “It’s always the quiet ones that have tricks up their sleeves.”

“Such was yourself.” says Hannibal, he and Margot exchanging knowing looks. *‘What is it with these people and gorging themselves on feigned secrecy?’*

“Pardon me for asking, but what do you mean by tonight’s festivities?” Alana takes her chance to speak, chewing her lip. She’s asked the question Will has been thinking about from

the moment they left her home. Placing down his goblet of wine, Hannibal clears his throat.

“We are celebrating the arrival of the Great Hunger, Ms. Bloom.” It’s probably the most honest thing he’s said all night.

“The Great Hunger?” She repeats.

“Indeed. We celebrate by inciting the liberation of the self. We eat, we drink, we make ourselves merry. Shame has no seat in tonight’s festivities. Only our collective harvest of homegrown pleasure.”

“How Bacchanalian of you,” says Will.

“You say th—” Jolted out of their convivial reverie, the crash of a wine glass smashing upon the table slices their conversation short. Will stiffens, catching Margot’s sigh behind her veil at the interruption. Stood right across from him, Will notices that the culprit is the same stout man he’d seen at the refreshments table. His eyes are peeled wide in fear, the whites of them blinding. The man stumbles backwards, stuttering nonsense, intakes of breath like a metronome.

“This!…th—this isn’t wine! Its blood! Why am I drinking blood!” Will frowns at the claim. Striding toward the startled man, Hannibal plucks the broken wine glass from his hand and sniffs what’s left of the wine in it.

“I see,” The crowd pauses to listen in on the commotion. Some guests are still chewing, some are murmuring to each other, but all eyes are on Hannibal. Fixated upon his words. Again. “Franklyn, tell me, how familiar are you with the tasting notes of Teran wine? Teran grapes are widely known to yield wines that smell and taste of fresh blood. I assure you, it is nothing for you to fret over.”

“I…” Hands jittering, Franklyn shakes his head in answer. He doesn’t seem all that convinced. Before long, Dr. Lecter will have a scandal on his hands if he doesn’t deescalate it now. “No. No, I know what blood—surely, you can tell it’s too thick to be wine! I’m not crazy, alright? I—I kid you not, I was taking a sip from my glass and swallowed a mouthful of blood. A real, proper mouthful!”

“I have personally overseen the selection of wine that is to be served at my party—“

“He drank from my glass.” Hannibal blinks at the interruption as the robotic man from earlier approaches the doctor and Franklyn. The twitch of Hannibal’s jaw is all Will needs to see to confirm that he’s displeased. “I apologise for the interruption, everyone.” He takes Franklyn by the arm and readies them both to leave when Hannibal stops them in their tracks, Franklyn on the verge of passing out.

“I didn’t see you ask to be excused, Mr. Budge. And you interrupted me. That is very rude.”

“It is.” Budge, as Hannibal called him, goes to pull something from his pocket but before Will can do so much as blink, Hannibal beats Budge to the punch. Wielding a shard of glass, he slits Franklyn’s throat open.

In front of everyone.

The deed is done before anyone has the chance to run or scream. Blood pumps from the smiling wound in Franklyn's neck, painting his suit collar, his shirt red. A few gasps echo amongst the crowd, including Alana's. Will doesn't find the urge to shrink back in horror—he just stands there in silence. Franklyn yelps, hands going to staunch the blood flow. He collapses onto the floor like a slaughtered pig, mumbling unintelligible pleas. The crowd's lack of reaction is telling. Calm in the face of bloodshed as if Hannibal's actions were a trivial matter. Killing a man in cold blood without batting an eye is not your usual Sunday gossip topic. Your guests remaining unperturbed by the act implies that murder is not an unfamiliar spectacle for them. A chill slithers down Will's spine. Joking about impromptu cult meetings no longer seems apt.

"I was going to do that minus the audience." Budge discards his veil, nostrils flaring. One by one, the other veiled guests reveal their faces in succession, fang-like teeth sliding from their gums. With Hannibal being the last to remove his veil, they all lean towards a dying Franklyn. Nothing more happens where Will anticipates a massacre. Maybe that's for later. Curse his intuition for being right about this evening. Alana won't live it down. Nobody moves to help Franklyn, either, save for Hannibal himself. He glances at the rising moon outside. As Antony said it would be, it's red. Shining like a bloodshot eye.

"I know," says Hannibal. Will can't rip his gaze from the rows of sharp fangs now lining the doctor's mouth. How many have met their end at those crooked teeth? An oily black fog clouds Hannibal's pupils as it does Budge's. The stares of their fellow vampiric peers. "You were never one to share."

Fists clenched, Alana grabs onto Will's arm. Squeezes it tight.

"Dr. Lecter?" Franklyn wheezes, wobbling voice like plucked violin strings.

"You won't remember any of this, Franklyn. It's best if you don't." Hannibal informs him and Budge bites Franklyn's arm at the doctor's instruction, fangs sinking into his flesh. At first, Franklyn gasps in pain, yet his eyes squeeze shut in apparent bliss seconds later. He then picks himself up off the floor as though he wasn't about to drown in a pool of his own blood. Budge licks the residue from his teeth. Does Franklyn register that he's still dying? Will doesn't think so.

"Now, I know the rest of you may be reeling at the change in pace. But I assure you, tonight is not about murder, or fostering enemies." Here comes the expected speech for a man, vampire, of Hannibal's calibre. "Tonight is about losing ourselves to pleasure. To the Great Hunger that lives within our bellies." A chorus of cheers bounces across the open room. Antony, pale as paper, clutches onto Will's goblet, knuckles blooming white. "For most of us, this is old news. Yet, your chosen patrons are yet to succeed in the initiation ritual."

"Hannibal…" Alana begins, shaking her head in denial.

"All of us have since ingested a large enough dose of venom to loosen the inhibitions of the body. An apéritif, if you will." Will grits his teeth, thinking of the goblet in Antony's hand. "I hadn't planned on the next phase of our evening commencing so soon, however, it seems that

the majority of us are eager to embrace our age-old tradition," The humour in his tone makes Will want to yank him by the fucking collar and beat some sense into him. "And to those yet to join the ranks of the undead, complete the initiation before the light of dawn caresses the cliffs and your life shall be spared."

"And if we don't?" Will dares to ask, nerves set alight with an easy warmth that makes his skin crawl.

"Every death shall be an enjoyable one, for anything less is a grievance against the Great Hunger. Besides, I'd much prefer you live, Will. Personal bias aside." For once, Will agrees. Pleased with his speech, Hannibal waves and the live band once again commences, the party resuming its earlier gold-encrusted clamour. *'This is why I never fucking accept any party invitations.'* Irony is a bitch. Alana downs the remainder of her wine in a clutch for courage, some of it spilling. A myriad of emotions burrows themselves in Will's gut. Determination. Betrayal. Anger. Red hot anger. Will is going to survive until dawn.

Whatever it takes to do so, he is going to fucking do it.

knew.

Chapter Notes

> Hello, hello! Here's an extra-long chapter to apologise for the extended delay in posting this final update! Here we are at last! Here’s to vampire orgies and uh, trying new things?

“Something's not right about what I'm doing but I'm still doing it...the enormity of my desire disgusts me.” - Richard Siken

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Everyone scatters across the property at Hannibal’s bidding. Well, almost. Will’s feet remain rooted in place in front of the window wall while Margot, Antony, and Alana dissolve into the river of guests congregating outside. Under the molten light of the blood moon, the true nature of tonight’s festivities comes to the surface. Baltimore’s immortal elites, bored to death by power and unspeakable wealth, have gathered here to indulge in what they can’t buy with the mere snap of a finger. The taboo becomes currency where money has no impact. Hannibal may have said that fostering control is a form of gluttony, but to reject it entirely? Chaos is a risk that few can afford.

The string quartet disbands. So do the caterers. Electronic music oozes from the speakers set up on the back patio, the hypnotic beat thumping against the concrete like a pulsing heart. From the corner of his eye, Will spies Hannibal striding past Margot with his veil in hand. A vast majority of the dancing guests have put their veils back on, in fact. Where did Alana disappear? She can’t be dead yet, the night is young. Or she could be.

God, what would Will even say to Jack and their colleagues if he survives this and she doesn’t? He wonders how much of the truth Alana would tell them if Will died instead of her. Stranded at a dinner party overrun by undercover vampires, it’s far too easy to forget what’s at stake amidst the overwhelming surroundings. Either Will surrenders to his supposed Great Hunger just to face the inevitable repercussions of surviving such a ritual—or he follows Franklyn and the rest of their human peers in spending his last seconds bleeding out on the dancefloor. Humiliated by their own mortality.

Out on the grass, Antony stands struck dumb at the nightmarish spectacle of a delirious, dying Franklyn swaying along to the rhythm. Arms outstretched, Franklyn beams from ear to ear. The soles of his shoes squeak every time he slips over the swelling puddle of his own blood. Will grimaces, venturing outside. Franklyn couldn’t care less about dying. The venom has rendered him oblivious. As expected, the surrounding vampires seem to share Franklyn’s stance. He may as well be a wind-up toy in their eyes; yet another source of jaded entertainment. Antony, his pressed shirt now stained with Franklyn’s spraying blood, whips

around to hurl hurried words at Hannibal. A stark contrast to his earlier laidback demeanour. *'All talk and no game, are you?'* The doctor, his expression masked by his diamond-encrusted veil, must've been watching Franklyn as well.

He drops dead like a fly.

Budge is nowhere to be seen. Will doesn't even flinch at the grisly sight. He chooses not to ask himself why. Wailing screams of horror rise from the jostling crowd just to be silenced in seconds. Dead meat. The saccharine stench of death clashes with the musk of sweat and designer perfume. Nearby vampires have the gall to lick the stained floor beneath Franklyn's corpse clean, lapping up the pooling blood like cats. It stains their hands, their clothes, their faces. Frowning, Will pushes his glasses up his nose. He thinks of Hannibal's speech, *'Every death shall be an enjoyable one.'* This has to be what he meant. Stranded here in the middle of the wilderness, anyone's chances of escaping the party before dawn without getting lost or slaughtered on sight are second to none. There are no visible vehicles on the property, either. Everyone arrived in hired limousines—an intentional choice that Will had every goddamn right to be suspicious over before. The only way out is through Hannibal's initiation ritual. The Great Hunger.

Over everything else, Will can't make out what Antony says, but he gestures toward Franklyn's body just for Hannibal to nod in indifference. Sounds about right. What reaction was Antony hoping to achieve? The doctor wouldn't go out of his way to protect him, or anyone else, from something he fully intended to happen.

"Idiot," Will mutters.

Hannibal turns to look Will dead in the eye. A rogue chill seizes the back of his neck. Naturally, Will doesn't find himself comforted by the knowledge that Hannibal can pick out his hushed voice from the dancing cacophony around them with ease.

"Found you." Hannibal mouths the words, playing into the illusion of perceived human weakness. Hiding from a supernatural creature hellbent on pursuing him is a losing game, for Hannibal has the home advantage. He slides through the crowd to stand beside Will, cocking his bejewelled head. "Did you misplace your wine goblet, Will?" Will almost laughs at him.

"I'm more of a whiskey type."

"I see. Like a dragon that swallows its own fire," Hannibal gestures to his neck and Will's eyes fixate upon the gloss of wet blood coating the underside of the doctor's strong jaw, the curve of his Adam's apple. To illustrate his metaphor, Hannibal drags his fingertips down from his pale throat to the centre of his chest. The doctor's hands are that of a seasoned pianist. Long, steady fingers that curl and straighten with surety. That kill with brutal efficiency. *'Remember Franklyn.'* Will reminds himself. "The liquid ease blazes a path through the overgrown underbrush of your throat. It clears the way for what little relief you can stomach." Sweaty palms resting on his upper thighs, Will presses down harder in an effort to shake the fog from his brain. *'Just the venom talking. Nothing more.'*

"Relief is never sweet, Doctor. Tasteless, at best."

“Oh, but it can be. Moreso than justified pain,” Hannibal replies, his tone teeming with velvety conviction. Unwarranted heat pools in Will’s gut at Hannibal’s surety, the brush of his fingertips over Will’s white knuckles that was in no way accidental. Gazing up at the scarlet moon for a moment, the doctor takes a step back.

It would be so easy to give in. So easy to fall into Hannibal’s arms, to let their bodies do the talking where words won’t cut it. Will is the captain of a ship that’s bound for the rocks and Hannibal is the devil beckoning him closer to his demise. There’s no way of predicting how long he’ll live before Hannibal disposes of him to find a new victim to play with. How could Will know that this isn’t just…standard practice for Hannibal? Seducing his hand-picked meals into an effortless death? Will isn’t special, and he wouldn’t expect himself to be considered as such in the company of the hidden elite. Yet, the doctor is nothing but convincing. Stood like a god amongst the chaos, Hannibal waits for him to make the first move. Again. His mind supplies a plethora of heated thoughts Will is far too ashamed to voice. “Pleasure, should you ask for it, can taste like paradise.”

“…Or like purgatory,” Will chokes, fixing his cufflinks. The doctor’s dark eyes shine beneath his veil like a skull-bound supernova. *‘Should I ask for it.’* He won’t, but what if Will did? Hannibal’s pink tongue sweeps over his pointed teeth before he dares to lean in. Will doesn’t retreat.

“What else offers us entry to Heaven, save the door of Death?”

“Dr. Lecter! There you are!” Antony calls out, Will’s supposed goblet no longer in his hand. It sits on a table nearby. Both of them swivel towards the sound. Hannibal exhales at the sudden interruption but recomposes himself into a picture of phantomlike politeness.

“Hello, Antony. You were looking for me?” Hannibal asks. Grateful for the moment of reprieve, Will shifts awkwardly. Why is he so worked up? Nothing happened. Shit, nothing *will* happen.

“Ah, Will, I didn’t see you back there! Hope you two haven’t started anything without me.” Antony winks and Will rolls his eyes, the tension between himself and the doctor pushed aside. For now. The brazen way that this man carries himself around Hannibal has Will’s skin prickling with irritation. Alana and Antony have that charming habit in common. Neither of them needs to know that when it comes to his humiliating attraction to the doctor, Will is a guilty fucking hypocrite. “I’ve heard a thing or two about tonight being *that* kind of party if you catch my drift,” Antony explains himself and Hannibal nods, sparing him a good-natured quirk of the lips. He scans the busy premises. Straightens his shoulders.

“What do you say, Will?” Hannibal loosens his bowtie and places it in Will’s palm. “Humour me.” Fellow guests observe with wide eyes as the doctor slips his suit jacket from his shoulders and hangs it up on a random chair. Will glares at him only for Hannibal to smirk back behind his veil. “You wish to live, do you not?”

“—I—this is…not what I imagined.” His train of thought shatters watching the doctor take off his tuxedo piece by piece, the bulk of his strength concealed behind expertly-tailored layers of clothing. *‘Fuck me, he’s strong.’* It’s Will that feels as though he’s being stripped to

nothing. For a vampire, Hannibal's skin looks tanned and smooth, the thick, greying hair upon his chest hidden behind—is the doctor wearing lace under his shirt?

"We'll get to that part." Hannibal says, capturing Will's face in his hands. It startles him. The unspoken power in Hannibal's bold gesture does little to ease Will's racing heart. Their faces are close. So close, in fact, that Will's stilted breaths poke holes in Hannibal's veil. Answering breaths fog the lenses of his glasses and Will removes them to better admire the fullness of Hannibal's soft lips, too afraid to close the distance. Imagines how they might feel upon his own, whose blood he would taste upon them. The doctor's firm body is warm to the touch, unlike before. Even his heart unveils a hint of a sluggish pulse. What else has changed since their earlier handshake? Is it because he's since been fed? Tucking a stray curl behind Will's ear, Hannibal chooses not to break the blaring silence. Will suppresses a violent shiver, Hannibal's unexpected gentleness taking him off-guard. No one's ever touched Will like that, like something to be cherished. *'This is a monster,'* Will wrestles with reason, *'You are not like him. He is not like you.'*

"You don't know what I want." Will's reply is barely above a whisper, struggling to come up with something to say that isn't a pathetic show of his hand. Hannibal stares at Will's lips. Glances into his eyes.

"Hm. Do you know what you want?" Hannibal's thumb catches Will's bottom lip. A needy whimper falls from his throat at the doctor's touch, blood rushing south so fast that Will's head starts spinning. "Beautiful. Open your mouth for me."

"Oh, come on! The night's not getting any younger!" Antony huffs, impatient. Hannibal doesn't turn to face him, still looking at Will. Waiting, as always. He says one word in response, low and sharp.

"Don't."

Antony shuts up. Will's hardening cock twitches in his trousers.

"Fuck." Will hisses. Gathering an idea of what Hannibal is planning to do, he clamps his mouth shut and begs his body to behave. Yet, Will doesn't pull away. God, he can't. The doctor chuckles at Will's external conflict and pricks his index finger on the edge of his exposed fang, making it bleed. He repeats himself. Slowly, as if to make Will squirm.

"Open your mouth for me, Will." Will's silent refusal does nothing to deter him. For a second, Will thinks he's made a fatal mistake. The commotion surrounding them fades into the dancing darkness, Will's knees buckling beneath the stark intensity of Hannibal's focused stare. He's so overwhelmed with so little merit. So desperate for affection. *'Please, please, please.*' His mind melts, his hands won't stop shaking. With his bleeding fingertip, Hannibal maps a path of red across the valley of Will's tingling lips. Will bites back a moan as his mouth is coaxed open, Hannibal pushing his finger inside of it. "Perfect thing," Hannibal murmurs, Will's tongue circling the intruding digits on instinct when Hannibal adds a second finger. "Look at you. You're so overwhelmed, so desperate for release. Let me guide you, angel. Come to me. Let me give you not what you want, but what you *need.*"

“No!” Will’s voice cracks as he says it, louder than he would’ve liked. Gagging on his second fill of venom, Will lurches away and out of Hannibal’s spell. It's what Will had tasted in his wine—he recognises the familiar bitter tang. *'Of course, the venom is in their fucking blood.'* Hannibal calls out after him, but Will forces himself to keep walking. Never mind how his nerves are buzzing with lust, how his erection refuses to settle despite Will’s persistent denial of wanting to fuck a handsome, manipulative vampire out to kill him and his colleague. The veiled grime of flowing blood and sweat now permeates the backyard; humans and vampires alike take notes from Hannibal’s book and tumble onto the nearest solid surfaces in reach, tearing off their suits and gowns with little to no consideration for the upkeep of their expensive clothing. What follows is obvious. Sensuous grinding crumbles into frantic motions of knees hitting the floor and trembling thighs spreading wide. Will tries and fails to block it all out, pausing to fix his cufflinks again out of anxious habit. Jesus. The lack of hesitation in his peers is both theatrical and borderline animalistic.

The remaining few continue to dance and drink, the cocktail of venom and pumping adrenaline yet to take over their resolve. A pliant sense of confidence floods Will’s muscles and he knows it’s Hannibal's venom settling further into his bloodstream. God help him. He chases every disobedient thought of Dr. Lecter from his mind with a proverbial broom, issuing himself cruel reminders of Hannibal's true nature. Anything to reset Will's wavering common sense. *‘Some nerve to compare me to pinot noir when you spiked my wine with your fucking blood.’*

Judging from the joyous deaths of several human attendees, the strength of a vampire’s venom is beyond terrifying. The victim is rendered oblivious, losing all sense of fear, self-consciousness, restraint—if that were Will, what would he have left without it? What kind of wretched creature would he become? He flees from the open jaws of the monstrous dancefloor, rejecting every single amorous invitation from those around him to join them in welcoming the Great Hunger. Running his hands through his curls, Will curses his trembling body for reacting the way it is. He won’t give in to anyone until he has no say over it and he won’t give Hannibal the satisfaction of witnessing it happen.

“Margot?” Creeping around the house, Will recognises the naked woman encrusted in pink pearls as Alana’s new friend. At his voice, her swollen lips pull away from the neck of another vampire girl. Margot smiles in a casual greeting, panting heavily. Blood trickles down her collarbone from where her companion’s fangs have punctured her pale flesh. They have identical wounds to boot. Will shifts his feet, hands tucking behind his back. “Um. I’m intruding.”

“You’re precious,” Margot snorts, releasing a raptured sigh as she hooks a milky thigh around her companion's bare hip and presses back onto the broken dessert table they’ve claimed as their own. “And sorely overdressed.”

“I didn’t come here to fuck.”

“So they say.” Margot’s amused tone breaks into a gasp at the heavy insistence of her current lover, their fingers buried inside her. Will focuses his attention on the shattered plates of ruined cream cakes and chocolate éclairs gathered at their feet instead. Fixes his cufflinks again, as if that does anything to lessen the awkward tension. Leftover cream and caramel

sauce drip down Margot's long legs, her toes curling in pleasure. "Mm. Why do you keep refusing Hannibal's advances like you are? Do you want to die like the rest of them? Is that it?" Her voice cracks, high-pitched noises liquefying into the surrounding ambience of loud sex and thumping bass. She's shameless. Body going boneless with the aftershocks of an apparent orgasm, Margot pulls away and laughs at Will as if he's the one who should feel embarrassed here. "Come here, Will. We'll help you adjust."

"I'd rather leave you both to—" Two pairs of arms yank him forward, Margot's lover rolling off of her body to make space for Will upon the collapsed tabletop. They're both a lot stronger than they look, pulling him close with ease. He prays that Alana is nowhere in sight for his sake more than hers. Christ. What would Hannibal say, do, if he saw Margot beating him to the punch?

"I'll let you in on a secret." Margot exposes her neck, the open wound there. The other vampire pulls at Will's suit jacket and he recoils from their touch. "Easy now. We're not going to kill you." Margot shakes her head, assisting them in slipping the garment off his body. He never bothered putting his glasses back on. "Venom forms in a vampire's blood after they feed. For us, it's a drug. For you, it's mercy." Will's brows furrow in momentary confusion, senses on high alert in the midst of so many predators. At least he can't see Hannibal from this angle. Antony's probably bouncing on his cock like a bitch in heat, anyway. Whatever. Fucking pathetic.

"What do you want from me, Margot?" Will grunts.

"Nothing drastic," She leans in, her cold lips ghosting behind his ear. He shudders at the close proximity of her honeyed voice. "Consider this, Graham. Help me seduce Alana and I'll help you on your…special case."

"There's always an ulterior motive with you people, isn't there?"

"Oh, we are no different from the living," says Margot, removing her veil. Her fangs aren't visible but he's well aware she still could bite him at any moment. The hairs on the nape of his neck stand on end, goosebumps scattering across his bare arms. Teetering towards the end of his time alive like a daredevil on the verge of an unstable cliff, Will is numb to the terror of it. Margot takes his hands and places them on her chest. "Kiss me."

"What?" Will repeats, not sure if he heard her right. Margot laughs, nipping at his earlobe.

"Just do it."

"Why the hell should I kiss you?" With that, she grabs his chin and jerks Will's head to the left of them.

"Hannibal." Mouth going dry as a desert, dread collects in the oasis of Will's stomach. Hannibal won't be letting Will get away with what he did, that much he's certain of. His pride wouldn't allow it. With no regard for the dark-haired woman he's making out with, Hannibal observes Will from afar. She wouldn't be able to tell that her lover isn't watching her. Her legs wrapped around his hips like a vice, Hannibal places the girl on top of a table that isn't yet

broken and settles between her thighs, the woman's earrings swinging like chandeliers in an earthquake. In an instant, the gears click in Will's brain.

It's Alana.

Despite her clear enthusiasm, Hannibal has chosen to maintain his line of sight with Will as he toys with none other than Alana Bloom. It's a challenge. A simple yet confronting message that Hannibal is sending him. *'This should be you.'* The longer he looks at them, Will feels his features wrinkling into an angry scowl, finally ripping his eyes away from Hannibal and back to Margot the moment the doctor begins to fuck that easy whore in earnest. Just who does he fucking think he is? Will grips Margot's face in his hands and kisses her hard, just like she'd told him to do.

"He beat me to her. Typical." Margot murmurs between insistent kisses, Will taking out his anger on her. She doesn't seem to mind, looping a hand around his neck. Her companion takes her chance to suckle from Margot's wound and slips a hand between her legs, "You want to win his game, you have to play by his rules," Quieter, Margot adds, "...Trust me, I know."

"Yet if I don't, you know. Sate my Great Hunger, I'll be just as dead as the rest of them." The taste of Margot's lips reminds him of iron-tainted caramel. He knows it's blood. More venom. Everything, everyone, is filthy with it.

"Will, I think you already know what your Hunger is. It's the pulling it off that you're afraid of." She muses, stripping Will of his undershirt and tossing it aside. The nighttime chill rolls up his exposed spine, making him shiver.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Will mumbles, letting Margot roll on top of him. Chin tucking over her shoulder, Will steals another glimpse of Hannibal fucking Alana on the table. Pretends that the groan leaving his throat is due to Margot's efforts and not at how Hannibal's broad shoulders ripple with exertion beneath the muted party lights. Margot sinks onto Will's cock, making him grunt in dulled pleasure as she begins to ride him. It feels good but he can't fucking focus on enjoying it when all Will can see is Hannibal is laid before them like a wild beast, his hips pistoning back and forth with steady, brutal thrusts. Will all but sneers, gathering up every atom of his boiling anger and channelling it into his encounter with Margot. His sudden change of pace startles her, yet Margot's mouth soon falls open in bliss. He and Hannibal make eye contact when the latter flips Alana onto her belly. Noticing Will's position, Hannibal snarls. A deep, ugly thing that reverberates in Will's ears. Margot stills at the sight of the doctor, yet Will urges her on. Why should Hannibal have the right to be jealous? Alana got what she wanted, Will wasn't the one who was fawning over Hannibal like a lovestruck teenager. Will should be relieved, amused, disturbed—anything other than enraged at the likes of Hannibal Lecter.

And yet, Will seethes with something wicked. Calls it anger, for lack of a better term. Thankfully, Margot seems to get this and lets Will go. He still needs to get off, but it can wait. Yanking up his underwear in a half-assed attempt at modesty, Will can't help but yell.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing, Alana?" Alana spits Hannibal's blood from her mouth at Will's abrupt arrival. He ventures close enough for her to know it's him talking, but

not too close for his own safety. She stutters, wiping the excess saliva from the edges of her mouth.

“I…I don’t want to die either, Will. Hannibal isn’t who you think he is.” Alana's lipstick stains the edges of her jaw and chin, the once collected waves on top of her head better resembling a bird's nest than a hairstyle. Hannibal pulls out of her at the sound of Will's voice, sitting up.

“No, he is.” Will scowls down at the doctor, fists clenched. Silent, Hannibal peers up at him and not over at Alana. Will tries not to gawk at Hannibal’s thick, unspent cock jutting out from underneath his skimpy underwear. Almost choking on his own tongue, Will claps his hands and refocuses his attention on Alana. Tells himself he’s supposed to be angry, not lusting after the man he fucking hates. “Anyone would say that after taking cock.”

“You’ve been nothing but mean to me, Will, and quite frankly, I don’t know why.” Her face screws up, glaring up at him. Wet fury shines in Alana's eyes. A stab of guilt lodges itself in Will's chest. “Why, Will?”

“Alana…” Will trails off, lips pulling into a thin line. Her hurt meshing with Hannibal's smoky desire distorts what heat he's feeling into a vague shape of hurt and misunderstanding. Will shakes his head, “Hannibal doesn't want you. He wants to get to me.”

“Perhaps, you just can't stand feeling inferior to me that you won't let yourself keep anything worthwhile. Anything that's good for you," What little air is left in Will's lungs is knocked out of him. "I told you to have fun tonight, Will. You promised me! I tried to protect you from them, but it turns out you’re no less dead than the rest of them are.”

“No, Alana, I—I know how to let go! I know what's good for me!”

“I don’t think you do.” Alana turns her back to him, Margot materialising from behind Will and wrapping an arm around her shoulder. “You’ve hurt me, Will.” She says nothing more and disappears into the crowd with Margot in tow. Will, his attention returning to Hannibal, lets the rage burn holes in the fabric of his choices.

“You!” Will feels his jaw clench with the fire of it and before Hannibal has a single chance to retort, Will grabs him by the shoulders and shoves him against the nearby window. No one tries to intervene. Hollers of encouragement are all Will catches. Fucking orgies.

“Will—”

“—I don’t know what you’ve done but you’ve got my friend believing that you’re a true fucking saint,” Will yanks the doctor closer with a single tug of his veil, tearing it from his face. Yet, Hannibal says nothing. Makes no move to fight back whatsoever. It triggers something in Will, his worn muscles searing with molten fury. *‘Fight it, fight it, fight it.’* He shouldn’t give Hannibal this. Shouldn’t be letting his feelings take complete and utter control. “—But I see who you are. *What* you are.” Will spits. Their chests heave in tandem, wine-tinged breaths quick, shallow. The urge to tear out Hannibal’s throat floods Will’s mind. It’s not like he’d die. Will's never felt this strong before, pinning the doctor against the glass.

When their gazes tangle, Hannibal's eyes are a different story. There's no soul behind those irises, no irritation or discomfort. Only curiosity overshadowed by a dark, nebulous lust.

"Because I want you to. Because you're just…like…me." Hannibal purrs, his sharp incisors glinting in the low light. Will stiffens, sweat gathering in his collarbones. *'Fight it, fight it, fucking fight it.'* Compared to Will, Hannibal is the picture of teasing composure. Like a cat that got the cream. "Shall I plead guilty in your eyes for seeing your potential, Will? Beg for your forgiveness, for your holy mercy?" Will's already half-hard just from hearing the rich, rumbling timbre of Hannibal's voice whispering into his neck, let alone what he's saying. Long lashes draped over his blown pupils, the doctor smooths his palms down Will's naked back. Hannibal chuckles at Will's yelp of surprise. He bites his bottom lip, the remnants of his lipstick staining the corners of his mouth. "Shall I remind you that you asked for this? Or did you forget you weren't like them? Foolish boy. From the moment you accepted my invitation, you knew."

"Y—Your version of salvation resides in needless bloodshed. In greed," Heart pounding so hard that Will swears Hannibal might hear it, Will's limbs tremble with unfounded hunger. He needs to come, fuck, he's needed to ever since Hannibal's fingers were shoved in his mouth. Since Will sucked each of them clean.

"It doesn't disgust you."

"It—" Hannibal wraps a large hand around the back of Will's head and guides him closer, slotting a thigh between his legs. Will shivers at the telltale feel of the doctor's hardness pressed against his hip. He doesn't know where to put his hands. On the glass in front of him or on Hannibal's waist. Pleasure, the first suggestion of it, overtakes Will's brain the second Hannibal starts to roll his hips in a search for friction. He mouths at Will's throat as he does, the sting of Hannibal's fangs making his breath stutter. Curse his body for being so sensitive. It's been far too long since Will's last sexual encounter, and no one in the past had ever infected his thoughts in this way. Blame the venom for making him desperate. His voice is shaking, shaking, shaking. Worse than before. "You—Christ, fuck—"

"I find myself famished for the sounds you make when I touch you like this," Hannibal lets out a low moan, littering every inch of Will's unblemished skin with lovebites. "You make me feel alive again. Only you."

"God, I…can't, we can't—" Will swears he's dying, suffocating in the thrall of every incoming sensation, every feeling, every barely-contained impulse. He should be running for his fucking life and yet in Hannibal's arms, Will doesn't want to flee. Every time it's been like this, flirting with Death like a madman. *'Fight it, fight it, fight it.'* Nothing's fucking working. None of it. Tastes of fleeting friction no longer suffice, Will wants more. So much, that he can't keep still. "Hannibal—"

"Hush, angel." Hannibal silences him and Will keens at the title. Placing a chaste kiss upon Will's cheek, Hannibal's voice dips lower, a sultry rasp reverberating in his ringing ears. "Your anger, Will. Give it to me. I want all of it."

Will doesn't need to be told twice. With hands gone red from how tightly he's been gripping Hannibal's hair, he slams the doctor against the window again, the glass resounding a loud

thud with the force of it as Will crashes his lips against Hannibal's. Surrendering to this desire feels too good to be true. If they're not careful, they'll burn alive in their fervour. Maybe that's better than surviving in the knowledge that Will lost to temptation. The fevered exchange makes animals out of men, their bodies pressed flush, moaning, grunting, panting into each other's mouths.

They toss what's left of Will's clothes to the ground, being paid no heed by the many naked, blood-soaked bodies surrounding them. Will's heart lurches. The intricate embroidery of Hannibal's underwear has Will wondering whether he'd worn a matching bra or a corset. One that skirts across the planes of Hannibal's muscled chest down to the slope of his hips, emphasising the bulge of his pretty cock. It's something Will never would've guessed he'd like on another man.

"I'm going to fucking kill you." He all but growls, careful not to cut his tongue on Hannibal's teeth.

"How intimate." Hannibal chuckles, sliding his hand down Will's bare torso. Further still until he's looking at Will in silent question. A pitiful whine escapes his mouth when the doctor palms his cock. God, it feels so good, so good. It was always going to be different with Hannibal, wasn't it? Nothing's distracting Will's thoughts this time. With slow strokes, Hannibal wrenches another filthy moan out of Will.

"Fuck, Han—"

"Tell me what you want, Will."

"I…I, um," Will stammers, a sudden, intense wave of fear washing over him. It's too real. Too much. "I don't know." Hannibal sighs. Pulls back. The whimper Will emits at the loss of contact is involuntary. A little embarrassing.

"May you find your Great Hunger within yourself, Will. I'll...take my leave." Hannibal, uncaring about his scantily-dressed state, stalks back to the party without another word. Will regrets saying anything, but it's too late to resume things. God-fucking-dammit. He glances down at his amethyst cufflinks laid on the concrete alongside his trousers and underwear.

"Well, you didn't do shit." Leaving them there, Will ventures back inside like a modern-day Adam in the Garden. Hovers over to the grand piano where it all began. Every nerve, every muscle in Will's body had sung for Hannibal's pleasure. That's something he can't deny. Hannibal isn't…afraid of him like the others were. Are. He had seen who Will was right from the start and still wanted his company.

Will bets he'd look beautiful on his knees. Warm, full eyes and kiss-swollen lips, a talented tongue. Will groans at the image of the doctor taking that position before him—if Will hadn't been a fucking coward and pulled back last second—taking Will's cock in his mouth, the added risk of his fangs scraping against the sensitive flesh, the pleasurable pain that would come from it. He pictures the reverse, how he might've tasted the venom-spiked blood, wine, and sweat on his skin, full and content with Hannibal's cock resting on his tongue. He'd let the doctor fuck his throat, taking it all to the best of his ability. Shit, he'd moan at the feeling of Hannibal's muscles shifting under his hands with every desperate thrust, the heavenly

noises falling from his throat. What he would do to hear it for himself. How Will's name would form upon Hannibal’s lips as Will tore the pleasure out of him. Gorged himself sick on it.

"Why can't I do one thing right?" Will runs his hands through his hair, frustrated with himself. Checking the time does little to ease his stress. Maybe there’s still a chance he’ll survive the night, should Hannibal let Will live after all of the shit he's put them both through. At least Alana might get her shot at happily ever after with Margot if Will kicks the bucket tonight. She may have been overbearing, but a friend regardless. Work wouldn't be the same without her. He thinks he should apologise, just in case. Alright then. Solid plan, leaving this world on good terms with his colleagues. If he's lucky, they'll look after his dogs for him. Drained corpses clutter the walls of the house. Alana isn't among them. Neither is Antony, the pretentious idiot. In the jungle of bodies, Will finds Alana with Margot as he expected. They make eye contact. She looks away. Hannibal is nowhere to be seen and Will tries not to visibly deflate in disappointment.

“Alana.” says Will, noticing the gaping wound on her neck. Who did that to her? Margot whistles.

“Hey, Will.” Alana replies, her arms crossed. Will no longer sticks out like a sore thumb despite his self-conscious streak, Alana and their peers have not a stitch of clothing on themselves. “Wasn’t sure if I’d see you again. Alive.” She frowns.

“Could say the same about you.” Will makes a point not to mention the gravity of her wound, Margot shaking her head at him when he goes to say something. So, Alana doesn’t know she’s dying. Just like Franklyn. He clasps his hands. “Um. Hope you’ve been having fun tonight. Sorry about before, by the way.”

“I have. Well, mostly. I get why you did what you did. You haven’t been, have you?” It’s a strangely casual encounter despite this being the first (and the last) time they’re seeing each other naked. Alana waves off his apology while Margot laps the blood from her wound. The venom will help reduce the pain in the grand scheme of things, Will supposes. Not that being unaware of his own death seems all that appealing to him. To Alana, Margot's feeding probably feels no more painful than a kiss.

“Could’ve been. I fucked it up. What's new?”

“I saw.” She snorts.

“Wish I’d followed your advice. Would've saved me a lot of time.”

“Oh, well. And I yours. You were...right about him.”

“Where *is* Hannibal?”

“Think you missed your chance,” Margot interjects. Kind of her to relay the harsh truth to his face.

“You saw that?” Will scanning the dancing crowd for any signs of the doctor. He finds Hannibal standing near the cliff's edge, kissing several smitten guests in turn, including Antony. That vicious, selfish feeling from before knocks at the door of Will's brain. Is it jealousy? Goaded on by the venom, the three of them sway to the beat. “Was hoping no one would’ve noticed.”

“Impossible when you’ve got the kind of hold on Hannibal that everyone else would kill for, Will. Christ, you’re blind sometimes. Moreso than me.” Alana rolls her eyes, patting Will's shoulder in the way she used to do. He'll let it slide. Picking up the empty amethyst goblet Antony had stolen from its place on the table, Will weighs it in his fist. That should be him over there with Hannibal. Finishing what they started. Instead, Antony has set his sights on seducing the party host. Getting on his knees for Hannibal must've been easier for the man than keeping his fucking mouth shut. Will huffs, eyebrows knitting together in annoyance. Alana raises an eyebrow at him. Lips quirking upward in a teasing grin, she laughs. “You’re into him.”

“Using my own words against me here.”

“Go, Will.”

The same jealous fog slithers down Will's arms at the vision of Antony moaning around Hannibal's cock. He enters the doctor's territory. Silent. Fuming. With his misplaced goblet in hand, Will creeps closer. *‘Enough of this,’* He thinks to himself, *‘All you’ve ever fucking done is get in the fucking way.’* The veil of the ocean roars beyond the cliff's edge, the grass soft upon the soles of Will's feet as his fingers tighten around the stem of the goblet. Hannibal acknowledges his presence with a wink. Stood like a looming shadow behind Antony, Will seethes. Smashes solid amethyst over the man’s skull without hesitation. He hears a sickening crack. Antony doesn’t have a chance to scream, his limp body collapsing at Hannibal’s feet. Kicking Antony's body aside, Will pushes Hannibal onto the ground and straddles his waist. He doesn't care that his cock hangs free in full view of the doctor.

“Hannibal, I…didn’t know what I was thinking,” Will drops the bloodied goblet, unable to settle on Hannibal’s lap. The haze of violent adrenaline has him shaking like a dog. Hannibal sets his hands on Will’s hips, gently pulling Will back to him. No one bothers to acknowledge how Will just murdered a man in cold blood, fellow guests too busy fraternising with their own Great Hunger. Must be a common occurrence at these meetings. Chaos always results in bloodshed—one aspect of a vampire's leftover humanity that refuses to die.

“There lies no shame in pursuing what we desire, Will. Only pleasure to be enjoyed.” Hannibal smiles down at him, a slow, tenuous thing. Will dares to smile back. “This is all I ever wanted for you, Will.”

“Tell me it’s okay, Hannibal. Tell me it’s okay to let go.”

“My beautiful, cunning boy,” Hannibal kisses his mouth, hands sliding down to knead at Will’s ass. His bare hips buck against the line of Hannibal’s clothed erection. “It always has been.”

Will kisses him back, then, moans into Hannibal's mouth. It's different this time, the air around them sizzling with lust. Will doesn't hold back, licking at the seam of Hannibal's lips, rocking his hips back. The heat of Hannibal's cock brushing against his own has sparks coiling in Will's gut. His breath hitches, fingers tugging at Hannibal's messy hair. *'More, more, more.'* He needs this. Needs it now. How else is Will supposed to act, hovering above the vampire he's been denying his growing attraction towards ever since they first met—already stripped down into nothing but lacy lingerie too sheer to conceal Hannibal's obvious desire?

God, Will wants to wipe that smug twinkle from his gaze with his hands and teeth and cock. The Great Hunger knows what it craves, and Will finds himself ravenous for Hannibal's pleasure. Making him take it, letting everyone see their beloved leader sob and beg for Will to let him come—the notion shouldn't excite him as much as it does. But that's the kicker.

He wants, he wants, Will fucking wants.

Isn't that what Hannibal had planned? It's now or never. As the monster wishes. With a feigned scoff, Will leans down to bite and suck at Hannibal's jaw, at the pale column of his exposed throat. Didn't know vampires could bruise, but Will likes to see his efforts repaid. He growls. "I want you to do something for me." Hannibal shivers.

"Anything."

"Bleed for me." Releasing a guttural moan, Hannibal bites his lip with a nod when Will pushes his panties to the side and fully exposes his hard, leaking cock. Precum pulses out of the slit, and Will groans in awe. He coats his fingers with it before slowly tugging the flesh in a torturous rhythm, thumbing the head. A series of desperate noises tumble from Hannibal's lips, his thighs clenching around Will's hips as he presses into the touch. Will is in his right mind to take him apart just like this, watching Hannibal's composed facade shatter in ecstasy. It's a sight he'll never forget. Will's never been harder in his life. Hannibal bites down on his arm, black blood pooling from the puncture wounds of his fangs. Will jerks him off with one hand as he collects the blood from Hannibal's wounds in his other palm. The doctor writhes in bliss beneath him, head thrown back while Will loses himself in the filthy sound of Hannibal fucking into his fist.

"Fuck me." The words don't process in Will's brain right away. Hannibal grabs a handful of his curls and yanks Will's face towards his own. Ushers him with a panting, keening urgency, teary eyes drilling into Will's skull. "Fuck me, Will." Will could come from him saying that alone.

"Shit, shit, shit." He curses when Hannibal spreads his thighs for him. "Yes." Following Hannibal's lead, as the doctor lies down, Will braces himself over his body, taking his heavy cock in hand and slicking it with Hannibal's blood. The vision must please Hannibal if his stuttering breath is anything to go by. Hannibal hooks his legs around the small of Will's back, angling for a proper kiss. Their teeth clash, mouths sliding together in pure heat. Will doesn't waste his time in opening Hannibal up, bloodied fingers catching on Hannibal's prostate again and again. The doctor is soon rocking onto Will's fingertips, wet cock leaking over his soft stomach. Brazen in his hunger, Hannibal entreats Will to take him hard, to fill him up. His lack of shame spurs Will on, his hands trembling as he lines himself up with

Hannibal's entrance. Is this what it means to be free with yourself? To let yourself enjoy every last drop of pleasure this life gives you? To not find fault within it? The taste of warm blood fills his mouth, Hannibal's teeth ripping into his bottom lip when Will pushes in.

"Fuck, you feel so good. Oh, Christ, fuck," Will curses in both pain and pleasure as he bottoms out, the words falling from his lips. Normally, he isn't so verbose during sex. Yet, Hannibal seems to relish in Will's candid commentary, urging him deeper still.

"That's it, angel. Take your pleasure from me. All of it. Use me. Fuck me." He babbles, hands resting on Will's bare chest. Spread out on the concrete before them, Will spies Alana squirming beneath Margot's blissed-out ministrations on her tongue. Blood blankets her body like a halo in a Renaissance painting. It won't be long until she passes out. A plan forms in his mind. On impulse, Will pulls out and shoves Hannibal onto his belly, draping himself over the doctor's back. Hannibal grunts at the loss of his cock inside him but Will drags up Hannibal's hips and drives into him from behind. He doesn't wait for Hannibal to adjust to the new angle, grunting with each rough thrust. The doctor should be facing in her direction now, a keening spectacle for his subjects to admire.

"Make it a good death, Hannibal." Will pants into Hannibal's ear. Hannibal whines in response, taking Alana's legs and pulling her body towards him. Margot follows along without protest, hips grinding into Alana's mouth with zero abandon. Diving his tongue into Alana's glistening cunt, Hannibal licks at her clit as Will pounds into him from behind. "Fuck, Han. Fuck, you look so good doing that." Alana doesn't stop Hannibal, either. She sobs his name, thighs squeezing around his ears. Hands digging into his hair, Alana's reverie is muffled by Margot's frantic motions. Will considers this one last favour to his dying friend. Now, they're even. Hips slamming against Hannibal's ass, Will feels the arousal building in his gut, threatening to snap. He's so close.

"Will, more. Please." Hannibal pleads, his cock dripping slick down his inner thighs, onto the ground below. The first rays of sunlight peer over the cliffside, yet the party is far from over. When Will reaches around to stroke him, it's all it takes for Hannibal to reach his peak, spilling white-hot onto the ground beneath them. Reverent praises fall from his open mouth, spoken in several languages Will doesn't recognise. Drinking in the gorgeous sight as he did that first glass of pinot noir, Will chases after his impending orgasm. Hannibal grunts filthy encouragements as he rocks back into Will's frenzied thrusts. "That's it, angel. Come for me. Let go."

And Will does. It hits him like a freight train, coming hard inside of Hannibal. He goes limp in exhaustion, hot sweat dripping from his chest, down his back. Letting Will catch his breath, Hannibal doesn't move until he does first. They shift into comfier positions upon the pillowy grass—Will pulling out and curling up in Hannibal's strong arms. Despite the certain implications the statement brings, Will swears that was the best sex he's ever had. With a fucking vampire, no less. God, it had been intense. Was the venom partially to blame? He wonders. Beams of sunlight wash over their tangled legs, the sun now halfway visible over their view of the sleeping sea. The wildfire in Will's belly subsides, and judging by the fact he's not dead, he believes he must've sated his Great Hunger. Completed the initiation ritual. Will doesn't know what's in store for him in the near future, or how he's going to explain to Jack that he witnessed Alana's death, but that can wait. Hannibal presses a chaste kiss to

Will’s lips, then to his crown, a low purr resounding from his ribs. It reminds him of a cat, the sound soothing Will's nerves. Cute. Resting his head upon Hannibal's chest, Will listens to the slowest heartbeat known to man. Smiles in disbelieving glee.

“Look what you’ve done to me, Hannibal. You ruined me.” says Will. With a laugh, the doctor sighs, his arms tightening around Will's waist. The pressure feels good. Comforting.

“On the contrary, darling, I only set the ball rolling," He answers, mouth tucked against Will's hair. "You alone decide the workings of your future. Not I, nor anyone else.”

“I feel…new. As if the scales have fallen from my eyes,” Will's word slur, heavy fatigue smacking him between the eyes. Having survived an adrenaline-spiked night of chaos on less than five hours of sleep, Will thinks he deserves some kind of trophy. A vacation from work, time with his dogs. Time with Hannibal, should this continue further. The words on his tongue dissolve into a whisper, quiet amidst the surrounding free-for-all. “Did I find my Great Hunger?”

“Even greater, Will. You’ve become it.”

End Notes

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What better way to kick off the astrological new year than by finally fucking posting? Aries season will do my muse some good, I can feel it. How are we feeling about this strange party? What will happen to Alana and Will? Please let me know your thoughts or comments if you have any, I'd love to hear them. Thank you for reading and I'll see you in the next update!

- Kit <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!